

More applying for assistance programs amid economic downturn

As the “slowing economy swells the ranks of the unemployed—and uninsured—more people are getting help from prescription drug assistance programs normally aimed at providing medications to the poorest Americans,” the Wall Street Journal reports. The programs, sponsored by pharmaceutical companies, provide consumers with billions of dollars worth of no-cost drugs every year. Most of these programs require that applicants have incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, but as “the economy weakens,” more people are getting approved, the Journal reports.

Many programs require that applicants provide tax statements or other proof of income, a prescription or letter from a physician, or proof that Medicaid has refused to pay for the drug. However, patient advocates say people should not assume they do not qualify because many programs have raised their minimum income levels and

other programs focus on an applicant’s percentage of income spent on prescription drugs rather than total income.

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance, a service of Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, reports that it helped more than 100,000 people enroll in public and private drug-assistance programs in recent months, an 11 percent increase from earlier this year.

Since 2005, PhRMA’s 35 member firms have provided \$13 billion in no-cost drugs, Ken Johnson, a spokesperson for PhRMA, said, adding, “These programs have always been designed to be a safety net, but more and more people are falling into it.”

In addition, drug-assistance programs are reporting a change in the type of applicants. AstraZeneca, which has

continued on page 2



Adam Hamm
Insurance Commissioner

Welcome to the *RxConnector* newsletter!

Dear friends,

This newsletter is designed to keep you up-to-date about the Prescription Connection for North Dakota program and to keep you in the know about the various prescription assistance programs that are available. From time to time, we may also include other items of interest related to Medicare and the State Health Insurance Counseling (SHIC) program.

As always, thank you so much for all that you do for the Prescription Connection program.

Without your help, our work would be that much harder. Your efforts are valued and appreciated.

If you have items of interest that you think should be included in this newsletter, we would love to hear about them. Please contact Sharon St. Aubin at ssaubin@nd.gov or call her at 1.888.575.6611.


Adam Hamm
Insurance Commissioner

**NORTH
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Adam W. Hamm, Commissioner

RxConnector is a publication of the Prescription Connection for North Dakota program.

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seen increased requests for all of its assistance programs, has had applications from insured people who are unable to afford drug copayments and Medicare beneficiaries “who run up against coverage gaps,” the Journal reports. Kimberly Chmielewski, executive director of the Community Pharmacy of Sarasota in Sarasota County, Fla., said, “We saw a lot of laborers, construction industry

and real-estate people at the beginning of the year,” adding, “Now it’s more professionals, more people who’ve been laid off by large employers and who’ve just had to give up their health benefits.”

Source: Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report

Economic stimulus package could include state Medicaid programs

A new economic stimulus package being considered by federal lawmakers and officials could include additional funding to state Medicaid programs, which could help prevent planned cuts in the programs, CQ HealthBeat reports.

U.S. Federal Reserve Board Chair Ben Bernanke in testimony before the House Budget Committee did not mention Medicaid specifically, but said an injection of federal money to bolster state services included in a stimulus bill would help the national economy, according to CQ HealthBeat. National Governors Association Executive Director Ray Scheppach said the chances of Medicaid funds being included in such a package have “very much” increased from earlier this year, when the first stimulus package was passed without such funds. President Bush is open to the possibility of a second package, but earlier this year objected to including money for Medicaid, CQ HealthBeat reports.

Scheppach said that passage of a stimulus bill with Medicaid funding could occur during the lame-duck session of Congress and suggested that the White House might be more open to negotiating on the matter. He said

states, which are facing a collective \$50 billion shortfall in fiscal year 2008-

2009, would be less likely to cut spending on Medicaid and other programs if they know lawmakers are working to provide federal assistance.

Bruce Yarwood, president of the American Health Care Association, said, “On behalf of the nation’s most vulnerable seniors who need and depend upon access to quality nursing home care, we believe any economic stimulus package must include a state Medicaid relief component” (Reichard, CQ HealthBeat, 10/20).

Source: Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report



Social Security’s compassionate allowances

Social Security is launching this expedited decision process with a total of 50 conditions. Over time, more diseases and conditions will be added. A list of the first 50 impairments—25 rare diseases and 25 cancers—can be found at www.socialsecurity.gov/compassionateallowances.

Compassionate Allowances is the second piece of the

agency’s two-track, fast-track system for certain disability claims. When combined with the agency’s Quick Disability Determination process, and once fully implemented, this two-track system could result in six to nine percent of disability claims, the cases for as much as a quarter million people, being decided in an average of six to eight days.

Go local North Dakota

North Dakotans now have a free, fast and easy way to find health services close to where they live.

A new website called “Go Local North Dakota: Discover Health Services Near You!”, <http://medlineplus.gov/golocalnd>, provides information and links to

hospitals, doctors, clinics, support groups, immunizations, home health care and other programs and services people can use to find help for themselves and their loved ones.

Source: AARP North Dakota News November 2008

Low income subsidy resource limits for 2009

The 2009 resource limits are \$8,100 (\$12,910 if married) for the full low-income subsidy and \$12,510 (\$25,010 if married) for other low-income subsidies. CMS will

release the 2009 income standards for the low-income subsidies in early 2009 after the release of the 2009 federal poverty levels (FPL).

Mexican “vanilla” with Coumarin: no bargain

Tourists tempted to pick up bargains south of the border should beware of one bargain that isn’t always a good buy—so-called Mexican “vanilla.” This flavoring product may smell like vanilla, taste like vanilla and be offered at a cheap price. But it’s often made with coumarin, a toxic substance banned in food in the United States.

In addition to being sold in Mexico and other Latin American countries, the coumarin-containing product has appeared on the shelves of some U.S. stores. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advises consumers not to purchase this product.

Pure vanilla is made with the extract of beans from the vanilla plant, a type of orchid that grows as a vine. Mexican vanilla is frequently made with the extract of beans from the tonka tree, an entirely different plant that belongs to the pea family.

Tonka bean extract contains coumarin, a compound related to warfarin, which is in some blood-thinning medications. Eating food containing coumarin may

be especially risky for people taking blood-thinning drugs because the interaction of coumarin and blood thinners can increase the likelihood of bleeding.

Source: FDA



Free 30-day medication supply

Xubex® is always looking for ways to help patients get the medications they need. They recently introduced a new program where patients can receive a 30 day supply of select popular brand medications absolutely FREE. It is easy for patients, physicians or an advocate to get a 30 day supply of medications free. Free

medication will be shipped within 24 hours.

<https://secure.xubex.com/FreeMedication.aspx>

Social Security backlog of disability claims

Despite hiring new judges with an additional \$150 million in funding, the Social Security Administration's backlog of disability claims has not been appreciably reduced over the last year, although the agency has processed most cases that have been in the pipeline the longest.

A person claiming disability benefits must prove to the Social Security Administration (SSA) that she or he is unable to perform any degree of work in order to begin receiving Social Security Disability Insurance.

Initial applications are often denied, leading to an appeal to an administrative law judge (ALJ) for reconsideration. More than 760,000 cases were pending review from an ALJ at the end of September. This is 14,000 more cases than were pending in September 2007, and shows that growth in the backlog

had slowed significantly. Previously, SSA had added about 70,000 cases to its backlog annually.

According to agency data, the average wait for a decision in September 2008 was 509 days. This is slightly longer than the average wait one year ago. During fiscal year 2008, SSA hired 190 new ALJs, opened a National Hearing Center (NHC), and eliminated virtually the entire backlog of over 135,000 cases that had been waiting over 900 days for a hearing decision.

SSA notes that the hiring of new ALJs was critical, but it will take a number of months before they become fully productive. The NHC will give SSA the capability of conducting video hearings in cities with the worst backlogs. The agency is also working with the Government Services Administration to establish new hearing offices.

IRS seeks to return \$357,600 in undeliverable refunds, rebates to ND

The Internal Revenue Service is looking for North Dakotans who are missing nearly 500 economic stimulus checks totaling about \$283,200 and more than 100 regular refund checks totaling about \$74,400 that were returned by the U.S. Postal Service due to mailing address errors. All a taxpayer has to do is update his or her address once. The IRS will then send out all checks due.

Stimulus checks

It is crucial that taxpayers who may be due a stimulus check update their addresses with the IRS. By law, economic stimulus checks must be sent out by Dec. 31 of this year. The undeliverable economic stimulus checks average \$569 in North Dakota.

The "Where's My Stimulus Payment?" tool on IRS.gov is the quickest and easiest way for a taxpayer to check the status of a stimulus check and receive instructions on how to update his or her address. Taxpayers without internet

access should call 1-866-234-2942.

Regular refunds

The regular refund checks that were returned to the IRS average \$658 in North Dakota. These checks are resent as soon as taxpayers update their address.

Taxpayers can update their addresses with the "Where's My Refund?" tool on IRS.gov. It enables taxpayers to check the status of their refunds. A taxpayer must submit his or her social security number, filing status and amount of refund shown on their 2007 return. The tool will provide the status of their refund and in some cases provide instructions on how to resolve delivery problems. Taxpayers checking on a refund over the phone will be given instructions on how to update their addresses. Taxpayers can access a telephone version of "Where's My Refund?" by calling 1-800-829-1954.

ASHA: American Social Health Association

ASHA's primary mission is improving the health of individuals, families, and communities, with a focus on preventing sexually transmitted diseases. Each year in the U.S. there are approximately 19 million new cases of STDs, about half of which occur in young people under age 25.

Visit ASHA online at www.ASHASTD.org. At their site one can read all about ASHA, its history, mission and can also access STD information. Or e-mail frewya@ashastd.org for more information.

Rx outreach has a new application

The four steps for mail-order prescription drugs using Rx Outreach are as follows:

1. Qualification of the applicant regarding annual household income
2. Medication is listed on the Rx Outreach drug list. Please note the changes in prices.
3. Obtain prescription from the doctor. Tiers 1 and 2 can have a 180 day supply with one refill. For Tier 3

medications, ask the doctor about a 90-day supply with three refills.

4. Mail the completed application, the prescriptions and the payment to Rx Outreach.

For more information call 1-800-769-3880 or go to www.rxoutreach.com

Drugmaker ads to target Obama idea

The nation's largest pharmaceutical lobbying group is preparing a multimillion-dollar public relations campaign to tout the importance of free-market health care and undercut an expected push by the Obama administration for price controls of prescription drugs.

The effort, which will include a national television commercial, is the first salvo in what likely will be a huge battle over health care reform during the Obama presidency.

Other major industries are also gearing up for the fight, including big businesses and insurance companies. But the stakes are especially high for drugmakers, which stand to lose as much as \$30 billion in revenue if President-elect Barack Obama's plan to let the federal government negotiate Medicare drug prices is implemented, according to one independent report.

Source: Washington Times

Beware of extortion scam by FDA impersonators

As part of a fraudulent scheme to extort money from consumers, callers have falsely identified themselves as officials from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Consumers should know that FDA officials never contact consumers by phone to demand money or any other form of payment. "Impersonating an FDA official is a violation of federal law," says Michael Chappell, FDA's acting associate commissioner for regulatory affairs.

Offers of discounted prescription drugs

Several instances have been reported to FDA of calls enticing consumers to purchase discounted prescription drugs by wiring funds to one of several locations in the Dominican Republic. No medications are ever delivered. A subsequent call is received from a fraudulent "FDA special agent" informing the consumer that a fine of several thousand dollars is required to be sent to an address in the Dominican Republic to prevent incarceration or other legal action.

Though the fraudulent calls appear to be from telephone numbers located within the United States, they are from either ported voice-over-the-Internet-protocol numbers

(calls made directly from a computer and moved or "ported" to other computers to avoid detection) or cellular phones.

This scheme most likely began with the theft of personal information from consumers who previously purchased drugs via the Internet or telephone, or who were victims of credit card fraud. FDA reminds consumers to purchase prescription drugs only from licensed pharmacies located in the United States.

Report complaints or information regarding this scheme to FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations at (800) 521-5783.



Pharmaceutical companies reduced ad dollars in first half of 2008

Pharmaceutical companies reduced spending on advertisements in the first six months of the year, according to reports released recently by TNS Media Intelligence and Nielsen Monitor-Plus, USA Today reports.

According to the report, pharmaceutical companies reduced spending on ads by 3.9% to \$2.4 billion in the first six months of the year. In the second quarter, pharmaceutical companies reduced spending on

magazine ads by 29% to \$358 million and reduced spending on radio ads by 62% to \$4 million, the TNS report found.

The report released by Nielsen found that in the first six months of the year, pharmaceutical companies reduced spending on ads by 4.8% to \$2.7 billion.

Source: Kaiser Daily Health Policy Report

FDA warns Bayer about two unapproved aspirin products

On Oct. 28, 2008, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) sent warning letters to Bayer HealthCare regarding two over-the-counter (OTC) products that combine aspirin with a dietary supplement into a single pill. The products are not approved by FDA.

Which products are affected?

Bayer Aspirin with Heart Advantage (Bayer Heart Advantage)—aspirin combined with phytosterols (a plant-

based supplement also known as plant sterols) Bayer Women's Low Dose Aspirin + Calcium (Bayer Women's)—aspirin combined with calcium

For more information, visit <http://www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/bayer102808.html>.

Source: FDA

Patient access network

Patient Access Network (PAN) Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit established in 2004, dedicated to assisting patients who cannot afford the out-of-pocket costs associated with their treatment needs.

With 20 disease-specific funds, PAN assists the underinsured in accessing health care treatments. Throughout all 50 states and three U.S. territories PAN provides trained case managers that patients or advocates may speak with about their care. PAN provides hope at times when people have nowhere else to turn.

Since October 2004, PAN has helped more than 42,000 underinsured patients cover out-of-pocket medical expenses. Our assistance averages more than \$ 3,300 per patient per year.

The Foundation is seeking financial donations of all levels from both the public and private sector. Anyone may be a sponsor to the Foundation, from corporations to individuals to other patient advocacy groups. Your donations may be tax deductible and may be earmarked for use in providing assistance to patients in specific disease categories.

Rationale & need

With rising deductibles and co-pays, even if patients have insurance, many may not be able to afford the care they need. Rising health care costs for patients, therefore, have a direct, adverse effect on access to medication and therapy. Patients may discontinue compliance or not seek care at all because of an inability to pay.

Traditional patient assistance programs cannot serve these financially-needy patients who have insurance but cannot afford the associated costs with coverage. The Patient Access Network Foundation was created as a potential solution to assist the "underinsured" in accessing health care technologies and treatments.

For those interested in applying for assistance within these funded treatment areas, please call 1.866.316.PANF (7263). A Patient Access Network Foundation counselor will work with the applicant directly to assist in completing the application and assess eligibility for assistance. An application for assistance can be mailed or faxed directly to the applicant or physician. Once completed, the application can be mailed or faxed back to the Foundation at:

Patient Access Network Foundation
 PO Box 221858
 Charlotte NC 28222-1858
 Fax:1.866.316.7261

<https://www.patientaccessnetwork.org/About.html>

To be eligible for assistance, patients must be U.S.

Needy meds.com is now needymeds.org

NeedyMeds was a .com but is now www.needymeds.org.

NeedyMeds now offers a new service: twice a month you can receive a list of all the drugs in their PAP database. Besides the drug name, the list contains the program name

residents and meet certain financial, medical and insurance criteria as set by the Foundation's board of directors. All applications must be verified by patients and their physicians and be supported by appropriate documentation as defined by each disease fund. Program counselors will personally work with patients to help them through the application process.

and the program phone numbers.

To learn more about this service, the cost, and to sign-up, send an email to monthlylist@needymeds.org.

Grant opportunity

NeedyMeds and RX Outreach have announced a new subsidized grant program for free clinics and other nonprofit organizations that serve PAP participants at no charge. Through the generosity of RX Outreach, NeedyMeds will help underwrite the monthly cost of PAPRxTracker for qualifying organizations for 12 months.

PAPRxTracker software automates application completion, allowing volunteers and staff to focus on outreach, counseling, and advocacy rather than repetitive paperwork.

For more information, email: incentivegrant@needymeds.org

